



Adrian M. Fenty, Mayor
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Dennis L. Rubin, Fire Chief
CONTACT: PIO 202.673.3331

Stress Test Saves Firefighter

Newly Implemented Test Can Spot Potentially Fatal Problems

(Washington) – A DC firefighter is recovering from quintuple bypass heart surgery after having potentially fatal cardiac blockages identified during a stress test Wednesday.

The 52-year-old veteran firefighter submitted to what is now a routine stress test given to all operational members of the department. During the test, the firefighter, who cannot be identified for privacy reasons, began exhibiting signs of distress, and an electrocardiogram analysis confirmed there was a problem. The firefighter was immediately transported to the Washington Hospital Center where surgery was performed, and the firefighter is now recovering.

“This is precisely what this program is designed to do,” said Fire & EMS Chief Dennis L. Rubin, who implemented the program in June of this year. “We know that the number one killer of firefighters is heart attack. If we can catch health problems before they become serious, we can save the lives of our own members as well as protect the citizens who need us to be healthy and strong for them.”

The U. S. Fire Administration (USFA) has tracked the number of firefighter fatalities and conducted an annual analysis for almost 30 years. Through

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the collection of information on the causes of firefighter deaths, the USFA is able to focus on specific problems and direct efforts toward finding solutions to reduce the number of firefighter fatalities in the future. Of the 118 firefighters who died in 2007, 52 or 44% died of heart attack. Twenty-five American firefighters have died of heart attacks through July 31st of this year.

Under the department's annual physical fitness program, all operational personnel will receive periodic cardiac stress testing. The goal of the test is to monitor cardiac function as it relates to physical exertion.

"This is a long overdue program that can only benefit the health and safety of our members," said International Association of Firefighters Local 36 President Dan Dugan, who noted the union's long-standing support for such a program.

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